



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

P.O. Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 234-0900 ~ Fax (406) 234-4368

February 16, 2018

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE

Re: Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement Proposal

Dear Interested Party:

Proposed Project Description

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) will be preparing an Environmental Analysis on a proposal to purchase a Conservation Easement on approximately 9,706 deeded acres in Treasure County, Montana. Please refer to Figure 1 for the general location and boundary of the proposed Conservation Easement.

Conservation easements are partnerships between FWP and willing private landowners to conserve important native wildlife habitats and provide public recreational access. The landowner receives financial compensation in exchange for adopting the conservation and public access covenants of the easement while continuing to operate their agricultural operation

The proposed easement, called the “Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement,” is approximately 90% native grassland and riparian habitat. This project is a unique opportunity to conserve riparian habitat along the Yellowstone River as well as sagebrush grasslands. The property is in Montana’s core sage-grouse habitat area and provides year-round habitat for antelope, mule deer, sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, black-tailed prairie dogs, burrowing owls and other grassland obligate species. The Yellowstone River portion of this ranch includes habitat for ring-necked pheasants, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, waterfowl, great blue herons and other non-game species. The Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement is adjacent to the FWP Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area and publicly accessible DNRC land. The Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area and Fishing Access Site are directly across the Yellowstone River from the proposed project area on the south shore.

A conservation easement would protect and enhance this important block of grassland and riparian habitat from conversion to other cover types, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also providing for managed public hunting and recreational opportunities. The anticipated funding for the proposed easement would come from three sources: Habitat Montana funds derived from hunting license sales and NRCS Agricultural Lands Easements funding. Placing a conservation easement on the property would have no effect on the taxable base of the property.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of this land project are to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat while maintaining traditional agricultural land uses and provide public hunting and recreational opportunity in an area composed largely of private lands.

Public Involvement and Process

Formal public participation specific to FWP's proposed purchase of this conservation easement begins with this scoping process. Public scoping comments will help in the development of a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) which would be available for a 30-day public review. Land projects also require approval from the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Montana State Board of Land Commissioners.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is requesting public input and comments (scoping) on the proposed project from **February 16, 2018 to March 16, 2018**. Please submit written comments regarding the proposed project to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Attn: Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement Proposal, PO Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301 or email comments to: satwood@mt.gov with the subject line: Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement Proposal.

If you have any questions regarding this project or scoping process, please contact Steve Atwood, FWP Wildlife Biologist, at (406) 234-0942 or e-mail questions to satwood@mt.gov.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposed conservation easement project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Schmitz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brad Schmitz
Regional Supervisor, Region 7

Figure 1: General location of the Antelope Coulee Conservation Easement and impacted lands. Conservation Easement covenants apply only to private land.

